



Fair Food WA

Inquiry into Food Security in Australia
Standing Committee on Agriculture

9 December 2022

[Fair Food WA](#) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the House Standing Committee on Agriculture's inquiry into Food Security in Australia.

Fair Food WA (FFWA) brings together expertise from the not-for-profit and government sectors to address food security in Western Australia. FFWA is funded by Lotterywest and hosted by the Western Australian Council of Social Service, the peak body representing the state's community service sector.

FFWA was established in 2017 to lead the development of a strategic [Framework](#) that provides an overview of the charity food sector and solutions to address food insecurity in Western Australia. Through the development of the Framework and progress on several recommended outcomes, FFWA is recognised as a leader in this space. They have provided strategic advice and guidance to other Australian states and were awarded the Gold Award for Best Practice in Collaboration at the 2021 Institute of Public Administration Australia WA awards.

The members of FFWA are committed to ensuring all people in Western Australia have the right to be food secure. We urge the Committee to recognise the drivers of food insecurity as rooted in the experience of poverty and financial hardship and to consider the unique circumstances of those living on an inadequate income within their deliberations. We note that agriculture is just one part of the food system and seek to highlight the food security needs of the many Australians relying on emergency food relief.

Yours sincerely,



Janine Freeman
FFWA Independent Chair

Contact Details

For further enquiries on this Submission please contact:

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Summary of Fair Food WA Recommendations

- As the aim of the Inquiry is to strengthen and safeguard food security, given the established link to income, the Federal Government must urgently increase the level of income support payments as recommended by the Raise the Rate Campaign.
- Establish a single agency to coordinate food related activity in Australia through the integration of a national food system framework.
- The Federal Government should work with the sector to apply, maintain and fund the Food Stress Index as a tool to combat food insecurity and apply the Index and its data collection, to map, measure, and monitor the potential risk of food insecurity and the appropriate policy action.
- Government progresses a dedicated remote food security and supply chain coordination office.
- Undertake a comprehensive systemic analysis of the nation's logistics and supply chain system by utilising experts across identified system segments, such as primary and agricultural producers, transport and infrastructure, workforce, warehousing, and distribution through to where and how food is consumed and utilised.
- Consider how the National Freight Datahub could host logistics and supply chain mapping to provide transparent and up to date information about the current national supply chain.
- Map and analyse the countries shipping lines and ports to identify opportunities to strengthen the efficiency of the network to maintain food supply to geographically isolated areas.
- Map existing infrastructure to identify where facilities are currently located and where there is a need to establish new storage infrastructure to improve food supply chain performance. This will enable the targeting of new infrastructure builds to address gaps.
- Undertake comprehensive mapping of the national logistics workforce, including current capability gaps. Mapping should include the workforce needs of today and the projected workforce needs of the future, with consideration of the geographical, environmental, and social context of each state and provide workforce opportunities to those people who live where infrastructure assets are located.
- Develop a disaster focused food security plan to integrate within a National food security strategy, that considers the unique food security impacts on people experiencing hardship and recognises the social, cultural, and dietary needs of all community members.

Definitions

Food insecurity

Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain ability to acquire an adequate amount of healthy food to meet ones needs.¹ The experience of being food insecure is underpinned by four pillars: food availability, access, utilisation and stability.²

Food insecurity is a growing concern across Australia. The latest Foodbank Hunger Report highlighted that 2 million households experienced severe food insecurity in the last 12 months.³ The primary reason behind household food insecurity is reported as the increased cost of living (64 %) followed by a lack of income (42%).⁴ It is expected that the number of Australians living in food insecure households will continue to grow.

Charity food

The majority of charity food becomes available via surplus in the commercial sector, whereby food distribution organisations collect food and redistribute it to charity food providers or directly to people in need of food relief. Prepared and processed foods are most often collected from the food service industry such as cafés, hotels and events, whilst perishable produce is generally obtained from retail sources such as supermarkets and commercial distribution centres. The primary goal of food distribution programs is to collect food donated from commercial sources and redirect it to charitable food services, as described above.

In 2022, it was reported that the charity food sector delivered support to approximately one million food insecure households in a typical month, despite this figure representing only 38% of households who identified as experiencing food insecurity in the last year.⁵ With many people experiencing food insecurity relying on the informal support of family and friends, it is evident that the true need for food relief services is already much greater than current supply of charity food can support.

¹ WACOSS Western Australian Council of Social Service (2019 WA Food Relief Framework <https://wacoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Food-Relief-Framework-report-sml.pdf>

² Committee on World Food Security. (2014). Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition. https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/cfs/Docs1314/GSF/GSF_Version_3_EN.pdf

³ Foodbank. (2022). Hunger Report. <https://reports.foodbank.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Foodbank-Hunger-Report-2022-1.pdf>

⁴ Foodbank. (2022). Hunger Report

⁵ Ibid

Fair Food WA response to the terms of the Inquiry

Fair Food WA express our concern that the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry do not consider the impact that the inadequate levels of social security have on national food security. The current cost of living crisis experienced nationwide, combined with the inadequacy of income support payments, is deepening the level of food insecurity being experienced by Australian households. The emergency relief and charity food sector in Western Australia, indicate that the rising cost of living is currently the highest determinant of food insecurity. This is consistent with findings from the 2022 Foodbank Hunger Report, which reported that the increasing cost of living was the most common reason for food insecurity (64% of food insecure households), followed by a reduced or low income (42% of food insecure households).⁶

The Australian Government can provide an immediate solution to the problem of food insecurity plaguing our country. Raising the rate of income support payments to be above the poverty line will enable many Australians to afford to put food on the table, an impact that was seen through the COVID-19 support measures. In March 2020, JobSeeker and related payments were almost doubled by \$275 a week under the 'Coronavirus Supplement'. This (and the JobKeeper wage subsidy) rescued hundreds of thousands of people from poverty, and the number of people in poverty fell from 3.0 million to 2.6 million.⁷ The Coronavirus supplement added \$550 per fortnight onto the base rate, which allowed families to pay rent, access nutritious food and decrease demand for emergency relief services.⁸ With this financial boost, families reported that they were "feeling more comfortable to stock the cupboards and fridges with groceries, being able to afford healthy food, especially with the children."⁹

A dignified food system is one where every individual and family has access to an adequate amount of safe and nutritious food without needing to rely on emergency relief food services. We urge the committee to recognise the impact of income on food security and to work with the Federal Government to urgently increase the level of social security payments.

⁶ Foodbank. (2022). Hunger Report. <https://reports.foodbank.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Foodbank-Hunger-Report-2022-1.pdf>

⁷ ACOSS. (2021). Raise the Rate for Good FAQ. <https://raisetherate.org.au/raise-the-rate-faqs/>

⁸ Anglicare WA. (2020). Jobseeker and Coronavirus Supplement. https://www.anglicarewa.org.au/docs/default-source/advocacy/anglicare-wa---jobseekersummary.pdf?sfvrsn=39bfbc60_2

⁹ Anglicare WA. (2020) The Impact of the Jobseeker Coronavirus Supplement. https://www.anglicarewa.org.au/docs/default-source/advocacy/anglicare-wa---jobseeker-supplementstories.pdf?sfvrsn=a21f6eb8_2

Recommendation: As the aim of the Inquiry is to strengthen and safeguard food security, given the established link to income, the Federal Government must urgently increase the level of income support payments as recommended by the Raise the Rate Campaign.

National production, consumption, and export of food

Food policy coordination

The number of state and federal inquiries into food security in recent times, signals a growing concern from governments about the ramifications of food insecurity on our social, health, and economic prosperity.

There are several government departments and agencies responsible for food policy in Australia. The Centre for Food Policy has identified 11 departments that actively work to create policies impacting our nation's food system.¹⁰ These Departments include social services; agriculture, water and environment; home affairs; Treasury; Finance; education, skills and employment; infrastructure, transport and regional development; foreign affairs and trade; and the Department of Health.¹¹ Given the recognition that food policy cuts across multiple spheres of government responsibility, the need for a food systems approach is increasingly being recommended as a solution to address this complex and growing issue.

Fair Food WA call on the Government to show leadership on a food systems approach and establish a single agency to coordinate food system activity in Australia. The central agency would be responsible for overseeing the integration of a national framework that coordinates food related activity in Australia with a focus on the social determinants of food insecurity. A coordinated food systems approach ensures that the priorities imperative to addressing food security nationwide are addressed across all areas of government policy making.

There are examples to draw from both the literature and food strategies internationally¹² whilst also looking at the various initiatives already being undertaken by some states and territories, including supply chain strategies and coordination.

¹⁰ Naudiyal, P., Reeve, B., Jones, A. & McDonald, S. (2022) Who is making food policy in Australia. London: Centre for Food Policy, City, University of London

¹¹ Pratibha Naudiyal, Belinda Reeve, Alexandra Jones and Sally McDonald (2021), Food policy in Australia: The role of different Federal Government organisations. Sydney, New South Wales: The University of Sydney.

¹² Kugelberg, S., Bartolini, F., Kanter, D., Milford, AB., Pira, K., Sanz-Cobena, A., & Leip, A. (2021). Implications of a food system approach for policy agenda setting design. *Global Food Security*, 28.

Recommendation: Establish a single agency to coordinate food related activity in Australia through the integration of a national food system framework.

Routine measurement of food security

Establishing a mechanism for the routine measurement and monitoring of food insecurity in Australia is an essential step in achieving evidence-based policy across the food system - the [Food Stress Index](#) provides such a mechanism. Developed in 2018, the Food Stress Index (FSI) combines multiple socioeconomic data sets, designed as a measure of overall advantage or disadvantage, with food affordability. Food affordability is determined by applying the food prices from the WA Food Access and Cost Survey. The resulting map shows the vulnerability of households in a geographic area to food stress and an estimation of the amount of food required for food stressed families in each geographic area.

In addition to providing an evidence-based tool to guide the prioritisation of food relief, the food stress index has been identified as having the potential to make a significant contribution to disaster and crisis relief. The FSI can be used to estimate how much food relief is required for various scenarios, for example, the requirements for 100 per cent food relief at a local government area level in natural disasters such as floods, cyclones and earthquakes. By changing the percentage of the population who are impacted, the Index can be applied to inform food acquisition, storage, and distribution options in the acute recovery phases of catastrophic events.

The FSI is informed by several datasets including the WA Food Access and Cost Survey. To enable the application of tools such as the FSI to all states, the Federal government should establish a mechanism for monitoring the cost, variety, quality, and availability of foods in grocery stores around Australia, including those in regional and remote communities.

Recommendation: The Federal Government should work with the sector to apply, maintain and fund the Food Stress Index as a tool to combat food insecurity and apply the Index and its data collection, to map, measure, and monitor the potential risk of food insecurity and the appropriate policy action.

The impact of supply chain distribution on the cost and availability of food

Geographic isolation

The high costs associated with the supply of food in geographically isolated regions is a well evidenced barrier to food security. In Australia, households in regional and remote areas are 30 per cent more likely to experience food insecurity than those in capital cities.¹³

The 2020 Inquiry into food prices and food security in remote Indigenous communities, investigated the impact of supply chain distribution on the cost and availability of food in regional and remote areas. The committee concluded that several factors are causal to the higher prices of food in remote communities. These include a combination of greater operating costs servicing small towns, the impact of scale on accessing wholesale and competitive pricing of goods, and the impact of freight and storage on both the quality and subsequent price of food.¹⁴

At the onset of COVID-19, the National Indigenous Australians Agency established the Food Security Working Group (Working Group) and Supermarket Taskforce which was convened by the Department of Home Affairs under the National Coordination Mechanism. The Supermarket Taskforce worked closely with the National COVID-19 Commission Advisory Board across multiple sectors to ensure that essential supplies were reserved for remote communities, and that supply lines were maintained despite COVID-19 border closures and logistic challenges. As a member of the Supermarket Taskforce the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission activated an exemption on regular conduct between supermarkets, enabling supermarkets to collaborate in the face of ongoing food supply issues and contributing to the continued supply of food and groceries to regional and remote areas. Given the success of their collaborative efforts, it was recommended by the 2020 inquiry, that the Food Security Working group be maintained with a focus on improving food security in remote communities.

In preparation for this submission we approached the Federal Government agency responsible for maintaining the national food security coordination group. Despite the Agency indicating its commitment to the group based on previous success supporting food security needs during COVID-19, it remains unclear if the group is currently being convened and what action is being taken to support coordination and address continued food security challenges in remote communities.

Recommendation: Government progresses a dedicated remote food security and supply chain coordination office.

¹³ Protocol for the Development of a Food Stress Index to Identify Households Most at Risk of Food Insecurity in Western Australia. Landrigan, T., Kerr, D., Dhaliwal, S., & Pollard, C. (2018).

[Freight and logistics mapping](#)

We support the Australian Government's commitment to a [National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy](#) and National Action Plan. Some states including [Queensland](#), have developed their own strategies and accompanying action plan to inform coordination of state-based freight and logistics. We encourage the Government to support each state and territory to develop their own strategies that consider the unique social, environmental and geographical context and the synergies needed to achieve national coordination across the food system.

The COVID-19 crisis combined with several climate driven weather events, has highlighted the fragility of the countries freight and logistics system in the ongoing supply of essentials and food. Western Australia experienced significant logistical disruptions in early 2022, when the north-west rail link was shut down and the State saw unique food supply challenges resulting from the large geographical area and dispersed population. At the time of writing, a large portion of the country is experiencing significant weather events that are impacting on both rail and road supply chains across the country. Despite the multiple Commonwealth inquiries and adoption of a national food security strategy in 2019, we have so far been unsuccessful in reducing food insecurity for many communities.

The National strategy should be reconsidered within the context of comprehensive food systems mapping. For any food policy to have impact, it must incorporate a whole of system approach that is determined by an informed understanding of the existing assets and gaps across the food supply chain. This will enable a range of responses that will contribute towards building a resilient, contemporary system that can withstand business as usual challenges while also having the scalability and appropriate contingency plans in place for when disasters hit.

Recommendation: Undertake a comprehensive systemic analysis of the nation's logistics and supply chain system by utilising experts across identified system segments, such as primary and agricultural producers, transport and infrastructure, workforce, warehousing, and distribution through to where and how food is consumed and utilised.

Recommendation: Consider how the National Freight Datahub could host logistics and supply chain mapping to provide transparent and up to date information about the current national supply chain.

Shipping and ports

The Australian Government's response to the Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities, indicates the need to investigate upgrades to the

infrastructure and shipping lanes that supply food to remote parts of Australia.¹⁵ Developing a detailed map of the nation's shipping lanes and ports, will help identify the opportunities to improve the way food is transported, stored and distributed, simplifying the logistical process and helping to ensure stability of food supply to geographically isolated areas. Increasing the use of shipping infrastructure in remote parts of the country will both improve the efficiency of the existing system and strengthen the supply chains capacity to upscale during disruption or disaster.

Recommendation: Map and analyse the countries shipping lines and ports to identify opportunities to strengthen the efficiency of the network to maintain food supply to geographically isolated areas.

Infrastructure

The location and quality of facilities used to store, package and distribute food can considerably impact the efficiency of food transport and ultimately the quality and availability of food supply. The National Strategy Action 1.2 signals a focus on the infrastructure needs in regional and remote Australia which will enable greater connection across the supply chain. Adequate facilities should exist within regional locations, with near proximity to major transport routes, suppliers and remote communities.¹⁶ The action plan should consider how optimising the locations of storage infrastructure can minimise the distance, time and subsequently the cost of transporting food.¹⁷ In response to the 2020 Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities, the Standing Committee also recommended that governments encourage the establishment of more local distribution centres by wholesalers in major regional centres closer to remote communities.¹⁸

Recommendation: Map existing infrastructure to identify where facilities are currently located and where there is a need to establish new storage infrastructure to improve food supply chain performance. This will enable the targeting of new infrastructure builds to address gaps.

Workforce

Australia's freight system relies on much more than physical infrastructure. For example, critical to our system is the workforce in areas such as transport, logistics,

¹⁵ Parliament of Australia. (2020). Report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities. www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Indigenous_Affairs/Foodpricing/Report

¹⁶ Mittal, A., Krejci, C., & Craven, T. (2018). Logistics best practices for regional food systems: A review. *Sustainability*, 10(1), 168. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10010168>

¹⁷ Health and Wellbeing Queensland. (2022). Evidence based review" freight and supply chain. Queensland Government. Brisbane, Australia.

¹⁸ Report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities (2020) page 27. https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Indigenous_Affairs/Foodpricing/Report

communications, and technology. These are in addition to the policy makers and researchers who shape the legislative, commercial, and economic environment that our system operates within. The capacity of our logistics workforce to adequately adapt and respond to the complexities of our food logistics system is essential. This includes the establishment of specialised skills, such as cold chain management for transport workers.¹⁹

In line with Action 2.2 outlined in the National Strategy, we recommend that the government undertake a comprehensive mapping exercise of the logistics system to understand the current state of the workforce and future long-term workforce needs and barriers, in addition to identifying options that address workforce challenges.

Further, appropriate workforce opportunities need to be provided to First Nations people to ensure that they see the economic benefits in their local community. By identifying workforce opportunities, including place based economic opportunities, we can both improve the wellbeing of people and communities and increase the efficiency and stability of our logistics system.

Recommendation: Undertake comprehensive mapping of the national logistics workforce, including current capability gaps. Mapping should include the workforce needs of today and the projected workforce needs of the future, with consideration of the geographical, environmental, and social context of each state, and provide workforce opportunities to those people who live where infrastructure assets are located

The potential opportunities and threats of climate change on food production in Australia

Food Security consequences during disaster events

Climate change is contributing to concurrent and increasingly severe disaster events both in Australia and worldwide. The fragility of our food system has been highlighted by climate driven disasters including fire, floods, and cyclones, which have impacted on food prices, availability, and the nutritional value of food supplies.²⁰

There is an array of data which highlights the disproportionate impact of climate driven events on vulnerable populations throughout the disaster continuum.²¹People

¹⁹ WA Department of Health (2003). Food North: Food for health in northern Australia.

²⁰ Beros, S. (2022). A report on current and growing risks and vulnerabilities in Australia's food supply chain arising from climate change. https://farmersforclimateaction.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Fork-in-the-Road_V5.pdf

²¹ Hallegatte, Stéphane & Vogt-Schilb, Adrien & Rozenberg, Julie & Bangalore, Mook & Beaudet, Chloé. (2020). From Poverty to Disaster and Back: a Review of the Literature. Economics of Disasters and Climate Change. 4. 1-25. 10.1007/s41885-020-00060-5.

experiencing poverty are at greater risk of exposure to disaster impacts whilst also having a reduced capacity to cope and recover from the subsequent loss.²² Those with intersectional vulnerabilities including people living with a disability, or those from non-English speaking backgrounds, face additional challenges building resilience to disaster risk and navigating support services following a disaster event. Due to the heightened risks for these population groups, all disaster planning should consider the necessary requirements to support the dietary, cultural and overall food security needs of those most at risk of adverse impacts during a disaster.

The National Royal Commission into disaster arrangements has highlighted several challenges with food supply and security during disaster events. During the 2019-2020 bushfires, local governments and community organisations received an influx in unsolicited donations of goods. This represented a significant logistical challenge for local communities and organisations involved in recovery. Sporadic donations of food also presented issues of food safety – for example, the need for refrigeration, which can be problematic after disaster as communities can experience lengthy periods without reliable power.²³ Recommendations around arrangements for donated goods were subsequently made, with a focus on implementing efficient and coordinated processes for ensuring adequate food supply and safety.

The potentially catastrophic impacts caused by food supply issues during disaster events reinforces the need for a national food security strategy and integrated disaster plan that responds to the risk of disruptions across all levels. This includes how local communities, regions, state and federal governments, manage food supply disruptions and the potential for globalised food security impacts as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendation: Develop a disaster focused food security plan to integrate within a National food security strategy, that considers the unique food security impacts on people experiencing hardship and recognises the social, cultural, and dietary needs of all community members.

²² Hallegatte, Stéphane & Vogt-Schilb, Adrien & Rozenberg, Julie & Bangalore, Mook & Beaudet, Chloé. (2020). From Poverty to Disaster and Back: a Review of the Literature. *Economics of Disasters and Climate Change*. 4. 1-25. 10.1007/s41885-020-00060-5.

²³ Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements - Report. (2020).

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